DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 086 PS 021 612

TITLE	Transportation for School-Age Child Care: Current Status in Westchester County.
INSTITUTION	Child Care Council of Westchester, Inc., White Plains, NY.
PUB DATE	[91]
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; *Board of Education Policy; Child Caregivers; Community Surveys; Economic Impact; *Educational Legislation; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *Needs Assessment; Policy Formation; Program Costs; *School Age Day Care; School District Autonomy; State Legislation; *Student Transportation
IDENTIFIERS	*New York (Westchester County)

ABSTRACT

Based on countywide interviews with transportation and child care personnel in Westchester County, New York, this report describes current practices, legislation, and issues related to the transportation of elementary school children to and from child care providers. Following a brief introduction, the report discusses various regulated and nonregulated child care options in the county and summarizes the provisions of the 1990 state transportation bill that made child care transportation optional for each district. The report goes on to review current practices in the 40 county school districts, indicating that, as of November, 1990: (1) 46% of the districts transported students to both regulated and nonregulated arrangements districtwide; (2) 12.5% transported children to both types of arrangements within school attendance zones, but only to state regulated programs districtwide; (3) 7.5% were developing transportation policies; (4) 20% had transportation systems in place for schools, but did not transport children to child care programs; and (5) 12.5% had no transportation at the elementary school level. Issues influencing district policies, including transportation costs, the size and density of the district, existing practices of busing children districtwide or via neighborhoods, and the availability of child care programs are discussed next. Finally, the report presents recommendations to establish consistent policies, enact minimum participation requirements, extend time limits, and reduce district mileage limits. District maps are included. (BCY)

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TRANSPORTATION FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE:

CURRENT STATUS IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY

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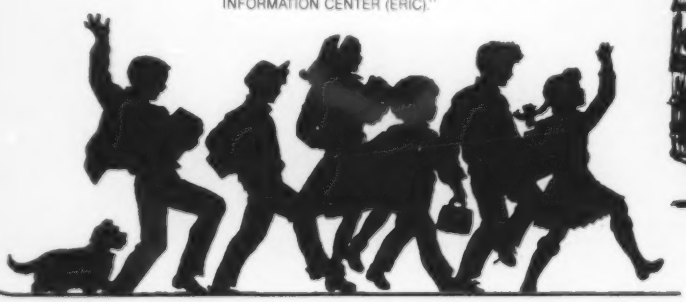

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade the American family has taken on a new look. This is very apparent in the lives of school-age children. Approximately 67% of all elementary school children have their mothers in the workforce. Most of these families are making special arrangements for before and after school child care. Transportation to and from these child care arrangements becomes a major factor for families when searching for appropriate before and after school experiences.

This school-age transportation problem is present throughout New York State. A state-wide school-age transportation law was passed in 1987 allowing districts to be reimbursed for transporting children to child care throughout the school district under the same guidelines as transportation from home to school.

Westchester County has a total of 40 school districts. Its combination of dense urban school districts, semi-rural areas and multiplicity of authorities provides a microcosm in which to study the effects of the school-age transportation law in a broad range of communities. The current transportation policies in Westchester for before and after school care vary greatly, with several districts having no policy at all. Considering the number of children involved and the high proportion of working mothers/parents in Westchester, the Child Care Council of Westchester, a private, not-for profit child care resource and referral agency, found it important to research and highlight this topic. With a grant from Work/Family Directions, a national child care benefits company, the Child Care Council undertook a study of the variety of policies that are in use throughout the County.

The findings reported here are as of November 1990. The consultant for the project interviewed head office and transportation personnel, as well as child care programs in the 40 school districts. It is our hope that these findings will be helpful to the community in increasing awareness of the complicated arrangements necessary to ensure smooth and productive days for school-age children. We also envision that the report will be utilized within the districts to focus attention on the issues involved in developing transportation policies. Finally it is our hope that this may be a useful document to inform and encourage those districts currently without a policy to consider the effects this has on families' ability to access needed child care arrangements.

We thank our colleagues in the state whose efforts led to the current legislation; the helpful staff in school districts' head offices and transportation departments who gave us their time and information; and Work/Family Directions whose vision made this project possible.

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE OPTIONS

Westchester school-age children use a variety of types of care. These types of care fall into two basic categories: Regulated care and Exempt care.

REGULATED CARE - PROGRAMS THAT ARE STATE OR COUNTY REGULATED

- **Licensed**
  Programs operating over three hours a day must be licensed by New York State Department of Social Services.
- **Certified Family Day Care Provider**
  A person caring for six to eight children in her/his own home. Regulated by Westchester County Department of Social Services.
- **Group Family Day Care**
  A person with an assistant caring for twelve to fourteen children in her/his own home. Regulated by New York State Department of Social Services.

Westchester County has a total elementary school population of 54,769 with a total of 4,911 legal before and after school, child care slots. (Programs identified by Child Care Council of Westchester). Thus less than 10% of the elementary population has access to regulated care.

EXEMPT CARE - PROGRAMS OR FORMS OF CARE THAT ARE LEGAL BUT OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT REGULATION

- **Programs Operating Fewer than Three Hours a Day**
  These programs do not have to be licensed. Beginning October 1991 all programs will be required to register with New York State Department of Social Services.
- **Family Day Care**
  Providers caring for one or two children, excluding their own, in their own home.
- **In Home**
  Children cared for in their own home by a relative or non-relative.
- **Relatives**
  Children cared for through extended family arrangement.
- **Community Activities**
  Local resources such as recreation departments, libraries, Boys Clubs, the Y's, sports, music lessons, etc. Although there is some adult supervision, in general there is no attendance kept nor action taken if a child does not show up.
- **Latchkey**
  Children who go home to an empty house until their parents return from work. According to the New York Council on Children and Families approximately 100,000 to 300,000 children ages 5 to 13 are at home alone without supervision before and after school.

The full extent of the use of all forms of exempt care has not been documented and is beyond the scope of this report.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT TRANSPORTATION BILL

TRANSPORTING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN TO AND FROM CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS.

- **The Law**
  Paragraph e of Subdivision 1 of section 3635 of the State Education Law passed in 1987 and amended again in 1990 permits a board of education to provide transportation of children in kindergarten through eighth grade between their schools and child care arrangements.

- **Optional**
  The provision of this transportation is optional for the district.

- **Equal Basis**
  If a district elects to transport for child care, the district must provide transportation on an equal basis for all children. The district must provide transportation to all licensed day care centers and school age child care programs throughout the district within the 15 mile limit, and to all regulated family day care and exempt care within the school attendance zone. (Attendance zone: The boundaries within which a child would attend a particular school within the district.)

- **State Aid**
  The law permits reimbursement for transportation for children where the distance between school and home is more than two miles and less than fifteen miles. Districts may make transportation available to children who reside less than two miles from school if they have voters approval to do so. State aid is still available to school districts that transport children who reside one and a half miles from school; transportation for any distance below this level must be paid for completely by the district.

  State aid for transportation of a child between school and a child care location is available on the same basis as for transportation between home and school. At present, 90% of the cost of transporting children within the established mileage limits is paid for by the State, and 10% is paid for by the local district.

- **Distance Requirements**
  Distance formulas for child care are the same as those used by the district for transportation between home and school. In the instance of a child care arrangement, measurement is made between school and child care arrangement. For example, a child who lives too close to school to be eligible for home to school transportation, may still be eligible for transportation to and from a child care location based on the distance between child care location and school.

- **Time Limit**
  Request for transportation between a child care location and school must be submitted to the school district by the first day of April preceding the school year for which transportation is sought or within thirty days after establishing residence in the school district.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

The consultant for the project contacted all forty school districts in November 1990. The interviews were conducted over the phone with head offices and transportation departments as well as with school age child care programs. The forty school districts in Westchester County follow five general transportation policies:

- **Comprehensive**
  46% of all districts, 47.5% of elementary school population.
  Nineteen districts have a comprehensive child care transportation policy. They have elected to transport for all child care (regulated and exempt) throughout the whole district.

- **Participating**
  12.5% of all districts, 12.9% of elementary school population.
  Five districts follow the legal participation requirements and transport children to regulated family day care and exempt care within school attendance zone and to licensed centers and programs throughout the district.

- **Developing**
  7.5% of all districts, 10.9% of elementary school population.
  Three districts are still developing their policies and are currently transporting children to all child care within the school's attendance zone. These districts are not meeting legal requirements.

- **Non-Participating**
  20% of all districts, 24% of elementary school population.
  Eight school districts have elementary school transportation in place from home to school, but have elected not to transport for child care.

- **Walking**
  12.5% of all districts, 6.3% of elementary school population.
  Five districts are walking districts, i.e. there is no transportation at the elementary level.

Only 60% of Westchester school districts have elected to transport for child care. 27.5% either do not transport or only partially comply with legal requirements. 12.5% have no transportation in place at the elementary level.

DISCUSSION: POSSIBLE ISSUES INFLUENCING A DISTRICT'S CHILD CARE TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Westchester County is very diverse, with both semi-rural versus urban, prosperous versus relatively poor, and with a variety of school systems: open enrollment plans, magnet school systems, Princeton plans and neighborhood schools districts. What are the possible issues that may have an impact on a district's transportation policy:

- **Cost of Transporting to Child Care**
  The new law was implemented to increase access to child care and reduce the potential cost to the school districts which could result from providing transportation for child care. Because transportation from school to child care is in lieu of transportation from school to home the cost differential should be minimal. A full cost analysis by districts was beyond the scope of this report.

- **Optional Versus Mandated Participating Requirements**
  Some anecdotal responses that we heard from transportation departments were "transporting to child care is too much trouble" and "if there is room on the bus, we will do it". In some districts, decisions regarding transportation were discretionary, left for a principal or a bus driver to decide from case to case. Inconsistencies or lack of official policy may reward the verbal, well-organized parent but offer no help for more vulnerable parents. It also leaves parents fearful of "rocking the boat" and losing what little they already have.

- **Size and Density of District**
  Large, low density districts did have a more comprehensive transportation policy. In the ten largest districts 90% had at least a comprehensive or participating transportation policy. Smaller, denser districts had no pattern as to type of transportation policy. Out of the ten highest density districts, 40% are walking, 20% are non participating, 40% are comprehensive.

- **District-Wide Transportation Versus Neighborhood Districts**
  School districts operating with a magnet system, Princeton plan or an open enrollment plan will draw their enrollment for each school from throughout the whole district. Our research found that every school district that was operating with a district-wide transportation system for home to school transportation also had a comprehensive child care transportation policy. Thus a district that already transports children throughout the district is more inclined to do so for child care as well.

- **Number of Elementary Schools**
  Small districts with only one elementary school draw enrollment from the whole district and transport throughout the district. These districts are more apt to implement a comprehensive child care transportation policy. Out of the thirteen districts in Westchester County with only one elementary school, eight or 62% are comprehensive. Three are walking districts. One is non-participating, and one has a discretionary policy. Out of the ten districts which bus at all, 80% have implemented a comprehensive child care transportation policy.

- **On-Site Child Care**
  Districts with on-site child care generally tend to have a comprehensive or participating child care transportation policy. Out of the nineteen districts that have on-site child care, fourteen districts or 73.7% have either comprehensive or participating policies. Two are non-participating, two are developing and one is a walking district. Having on-site care may at times hinder development of alternative programs as districts believe they have "dealt" with the need, and do not need to look beyond the one program offered.

- **Availability of Program**
  Less than 10% of the children enrolled in elementary school in Westchester County attend legal school-age child care programs. Several school districts were found to have no regulated program slots at all and very few regulated family day care slots. Lack of regulated programs may lead some districts to perceive that there is no need for a child care transportation policy, as the district has no program to bus to.

  As districts discuss transportation policies, they often think only of the more formal types of school-age programs. However, when we consider the vast developmental range of children between the ages of five and twelve and differing families' needs, we realize the necessity of many different programs and for a comprehensive transportation policy that enables children to access these programs.

- **Bus Fleet-Owned or Contracted**
  Some districts own their own busses, whereas other districts contract out. A few districts contract out to more than one company. Our research showed that this does not influence a district's transportation policy. 61% of districts with a comprehensive transportation policy had contracted services.

- **Current Bussing Mileage Limit**
  A few districts had mileage limits of one and a half - two miles for elementary children, as required by law; this limits the number of children eligible for transportation. In one district there is no transport for kindergarteners, although there is transportation for grade 1 and up. In another even the kindergartener is expected to walk two miles to school. Some parents in these districts are making private arrangements with local bus or cab companies for transportation of their children. This raises the issue of how far young elementary children can safely manage to walk on their own, and where the responsibility for a safe passage to school should lie.

CONCLUSION:

With an increased need for child care, [it is estimated that by 1995 three out of every four school-age children will have mothers in the workforce], transportation to and from school and child care locations becomes a key element in parents' ability to make appropriate arrangements for their children. As children move from the relative dependency of an entering kindergartener to the budding self-determination of a fifth grader, we need to design transportation policies that enable families to access a variety of child care options:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

ESTABLISH OFFICIAL, CONSISTENT POLICIES

Many districts have not addressed their transportation policies in an organized fashion and consequently have no "official" policy in regard to school-age child care transportation. This, at times, allows for inequality in services and illegal practices. Each district should have consistent official policies followed by all and made available to all families within the district.

MOVE DEVELOPING AND NON-PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS TO PARTICIPATING OR COMPREHENSIVE

27.5% of all districts in Westchester fall within developing and non-participating transportation category. With a change in these districts' policies, Westchester County would be up to an 87.5% participation rate.

CHANGES IN THE TRANSPORTATION LAW

ESTABLISH MINIMUM PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

If we expect each district to systematically address their particular child care transportation needs, we need to set some minimum participation requirements. As the law now stands, some districts make up their own rules confident they can always elect not to participate at all. One example is the district that chooses to charge a child care program for transportation, rather than implement a district-wide child care transportation policy. Other examples are districts that transport within attendance zone only, or have a discretionary policy. The before mentioned comment: "if there is room on the bus", or "if this [transportation for child care] becomes too much of a bother we will just stop altogether" are not conducive to the welfare of families as inequalities are tolerated for the fear of losing existing services.

EXTEND THE TIME LIMITS

An April 1st deadline seems unreasonable and works against the best interest of the children. Given the changes that happen in lives, a five month lead time is unrealistic. In today's economy, a lay-off or cut-back in hours of a father may force a mother into the workforce, but it may happen after April 1. Marital difficulties resulting in separation or divorce are frequently the cause of a change in child care needs. Sudden illness of a family member often requires an abrupt change in child care arrangements. None of these common occurrences are responsive to an April 1 deadline. An August 1 deadline would be more appropriate.

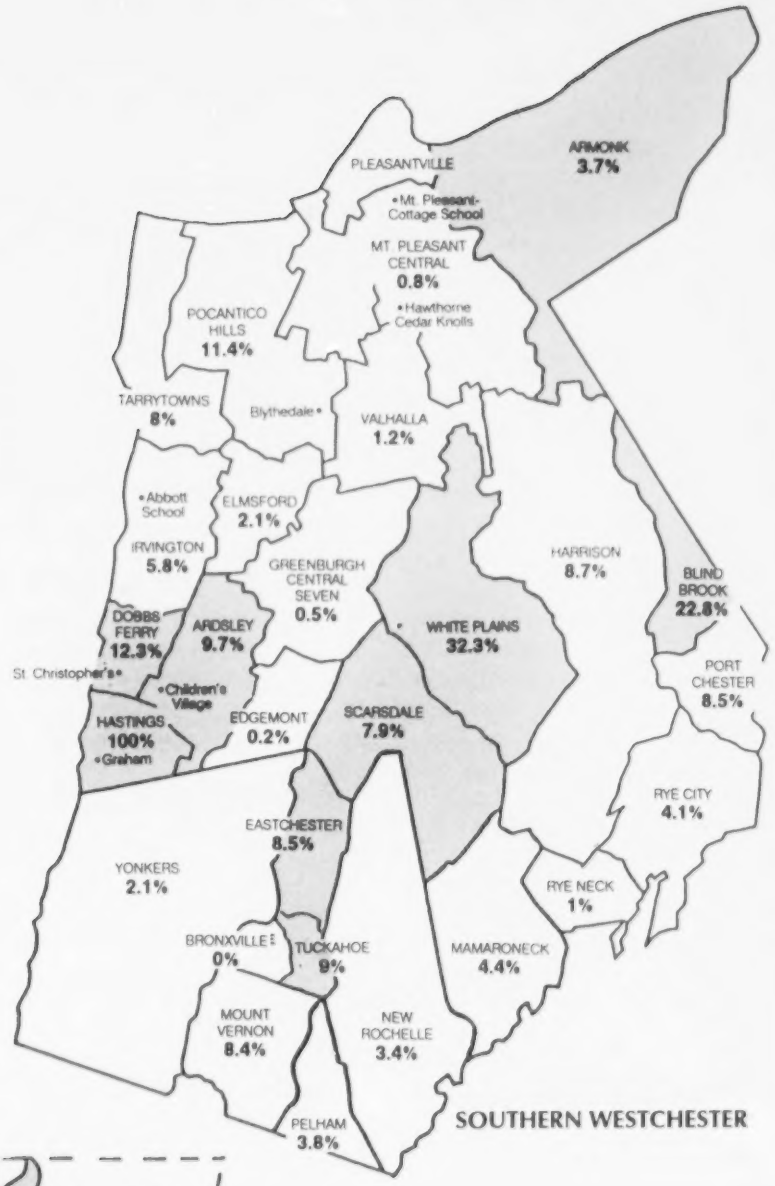
REDUCING THE MILEAGE LIMITS

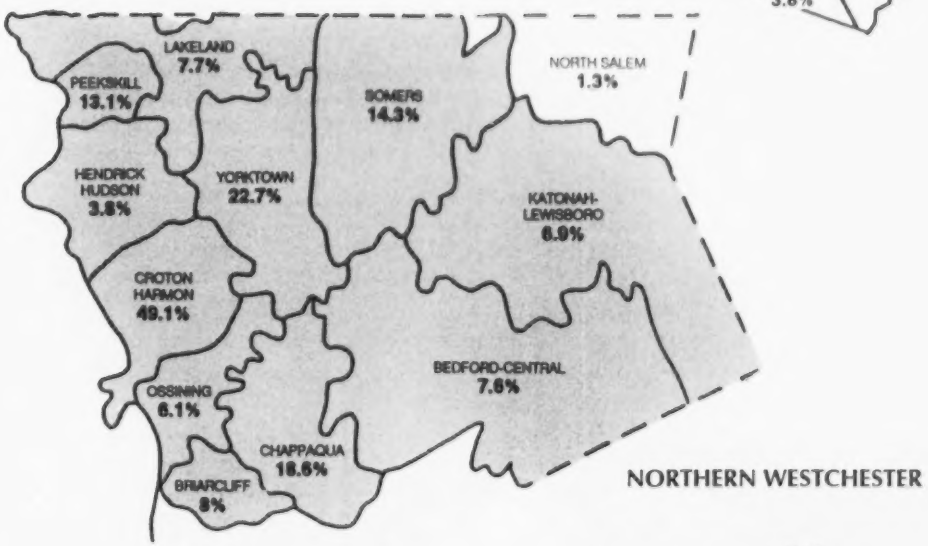
A mileage limit of one and a half - two miles seems too far for a five year old to walk alone. These children are developmentally unready for dealing with most emergencies and lack experience to make sound judgments. Many districts have clearly understood this and have lowered the mileage limit. It is recommended that the State mileage limits be lowered for the younger elementary population.

MAP I: On-Site Child Care

☐ ON-SITE CHILD CARE

Numbers on map represent percent of regulated school-age child care slots for each districts elementary population.





MAP II: Current Transportation Policies

☐ **COMPREHENSIVE: 46%**
Districts transporting to child care throughout the districts.

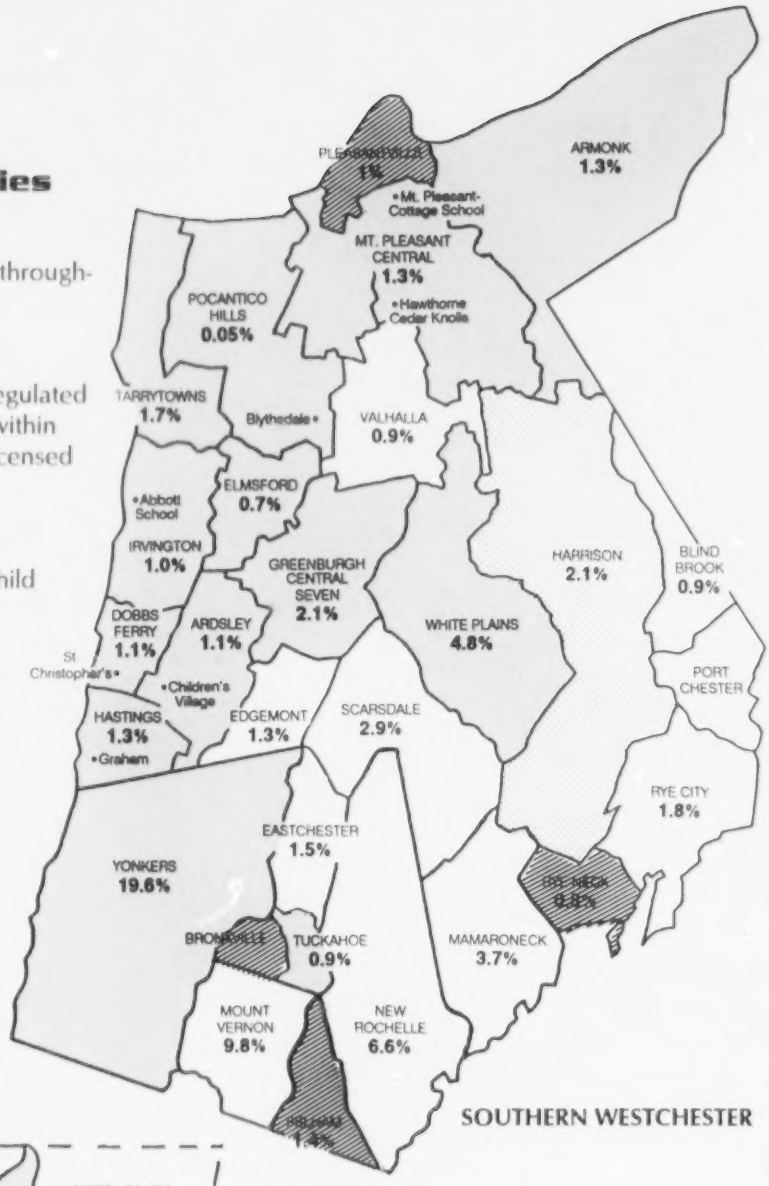
☐ **PARTICIPATING: 12.5%**
Districts transporting children to regulated family day care and exempt care within schools attendance zone and to licensed programs throughout the district.

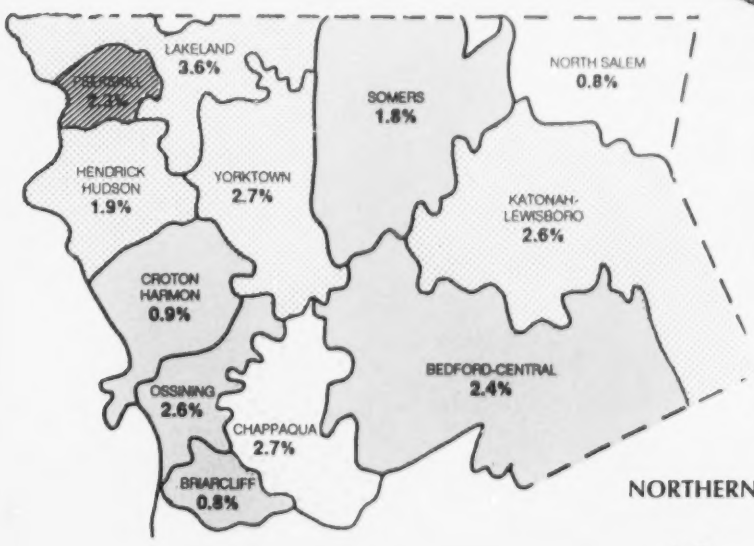
☐ **DEVELOPING: 7.5%**
Districts transporting children to child care within attendance zone.

☐ **NON-PARTICIPATING: 20%**
Districts not transporting to child care at all.

▨ **WALKING: 12.5%**
Districts with no transportation available for elementary level.

TOTAL ELEMENTARY POPULATION: 54,769
Numbers on map represent percent of elementary population for the district.





TRANSPORTATION DATA

Name	Elem. Enroll	Distr. Size	Distr./ Wide Transport	No. Elem. Schools	Contract Owned	Bus Policy	Transportation Policy
Ardsley	599	5.00	Y	1	C	K-4, .6M; 5-8, 1M	Comprehensive
Bedford	1357	57.96	N	4	C/O	K-12, 1M	Comprehensive
Blind Brook	508	4.00	Y	1	O	K-6, 1.5M	Non-Participating
Briarcliff Manor	451	5.00	Y	1	O	K-6, 1M	Comprehensive
Bronxville	447	1.00	Y	1			Walking
Byram Hills	703	24.50	Y	3	C	K-4, .5M	Comprehensive
Chappaqua	1494	21.50	N	3	C	K-6, .5M	Developing
Croton Harmon	466	15.00	Y	1	O	K,3/10M; 1-3,7/10M; 4-5,1M	Comprehensive
Dobbs Ferry	571	2.00	Y	1	C	K-5, All Bussed	Comprehensive
Eastchester	822	3.69	N	2	C	K-6, .5M	Developing
Edgemont	710	2.76	N	2	O	K-6, 2M	Non-Participating
Elmsford	374	10.00	Y	2	C	PreK-3, .5M	Comprehensive
Greenburgh	1144	25.00	Y	4	O	K-6, .5M	Comprehensive
Harrison Central	1170	24.00	N	4	C	K-3, .5M	Participating
Hastings On Hudson	490	2.00	Y	1	C	K, All Bussed; 1-3, .5M; 4-5, 1	Comprehensive
Hendrick Hudson	1018	22.00	N	3	C	K-5, All Bussed	Participating
Irvington	552	4.50	Y	1	C	K-5, All Bussed	Comprehensive
Katonah Lewisboro	1413	55.00	N	4	O	K-6, .5M	Participating
Lakeland	1989	42.00	N	5	O	K-6, All Bussed	Participating
Mamaroneck	2007	9.00	N	4	C	K-8, 2M	Non-Participating
Mount Pleasant	707	15.00	Y	2	C	K-, All Bussed	Comprehensive
Mount Vernon	5374	4.00	N	11	C	K, No Transport	Non-Participating
New Rochelle	3633	45.00	N	6	O	K-, 1.5M	Developing
North Salem	453	32.00	Y	1	O	K, 1/4M; 1-12, .5M	Comprehensive
Ossining	1441	10.00	Y	3	C	K-3, .5M; 4-8, 1M	Comprehensive
Peekskill	1281	4.00	N	4			Walking
Pelham	760	2.50	N	4			Walking
Pleasantville	558	2.00	N	1			Walking
Pocantico Hills	284	5.50	Y	1	O	K-8, 1/4M	Comprehensive/ Discretionary
Port Chester	1270	2.50	N	4	C	K-8, 1.5M	Non-Participating
Rye City	990	5.50	N	3	C	K-3, 3/4M; 4-6, 1.5M	Non-Participating
Rye Neck	414	1.75	Y	1			Walking
Scarsdale	1585	7.10	N	5	O	K-12, 1.5M	Non-Participating
Somers	988	33.00	Y	2	C	K-8, 1/4M	Comprehensive
Tarrytown	926	4.50	Y	5	O	K-3, .4M; 4-6, .8M	Comprehensive
Tuckahoe	495	2.25	Y	1	C	K-, 1/4M	Comprehensive
Valhalla	503	18.00	N	2	C	K-6, 1M	Non-Participating
White Plains	2633	11.75	N	6	C	K-4, .5M; 5-6, 1M	Comprehensive
Yonkers	10747	21.00	Y	23		K-, 1.5M	Comprehensive
Yorktown Central	1462	42.00	N	3	O	All Transported	Participating

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